



THIS LARGE CANVAS of Egmont with Ingleswood in the foreground was painted by Bernard Aris in 1939. Mr Aris was commissioned to do the work by the late Mr Percy White, of New Plymouth. He said he understood that Mr White wished to send the picture to Hull, England, from where some of the early settlers of Ingleswood came. Seen with Mr Aris in the photograph is the Mayor of Ingleswood, Mr R. W. Brown, who later bought the painting for £65 and presented it to the Ingleswood Borough Council in 1961. When working at the North Egmont hostel in the 1920s Bernard Aris would walk to Ingleswood and back for supplies.

★  
**BERNARD**  
**ARIS:**  
*a tribute*  
*by Anna*  
*Scanlan*  
 ★

# A MOUNTAIN AND HIS MOUNTAIN

The radio operator on board the Kia Ora when it steamed into New Plymouth at sunrise one morning in 1919 looked out across the water and saw a spectacular mountain. When he left on a sunny afternoon a few days later he was to carry that memory like a picture framed in his mind, and it was to prove a factor in his decision to return to New Zealand to live.

That was the real beginning of an abiding love that has lasted into the 82nd year of Bernard Aris, Egmont's most faithful and loving artist. He is a man who has never sought publicity, a modest man who often goes unrecognized, and whose many views of Egmont include its finest portrayal.

I set out to meet the Bernard Aris who, to me, had been only a name. He was born in Wallingford, Surrey, in 1887, and says that he has "always been a rebel." He remembers a kindergarten teacher when he was six years old who refused to believe that drawings of soldiers and trees were his own.

## Instinct

He first came to New Zealand in 1908 for health reasons, after working in a bank for four years, and tackled whatever job was available, from bush whacking or driving bullocks to general handyman or lingerie salesman. And, wherever he went, he "just went on drawing" with an instinct that was as natural as the air he breathed.

Returning to England, Bernard Aris trained as a radio operator and, in this capacity, supplemented by a natural ingenuity for engineering, he went to sea and travelled to far places. It was at sea that he began to find himself as an artist and the hand so skilful with pen and water colour recorded a story of ships and the passing scene.

## Torpedoed

Service in the First World War saw him torpedoed twice, a war which he illustrated in graphic pictures. Bernard Aris remembers it all well and, when he was

advised to seek a life on the shore, it is understandable that his mind should return to the peaceful memory of a mountain. He came back to New Zealand in 1922 and chose New Plymouth as his home a year later.

"I was always mad on mountains, trees, the sea and ships," Mr Aris told me. His first real exploration of Egmont as an artist came when, after being a guest, he decided to return temporarily to North Egmont hostel as a member of the staff. This gave him an opportunity to study the vegetation and character of the mountain at close range. "I painted seven water colours a day then," he said, "and I drew every darn thing that interested me as well."

## Enthralled

I can picture the young Bernard Aris as he tramped happily over the mountain with his haversack containing bread, cheese and apples — "in the days when they really tasted like apples" — a book for an idle moment and his drawing materials.

Bernard Aris was never afraid to walk wherever he went. He revelled in the sub-alpine bush and was enthralled by the effects of mists and moss on the trees of Egmont.

"Mist swirling about creates such weird effects along with the moss that trees are given different values and this always fascinated me," he explained. "It dominates and creates new patterns endless in variety."

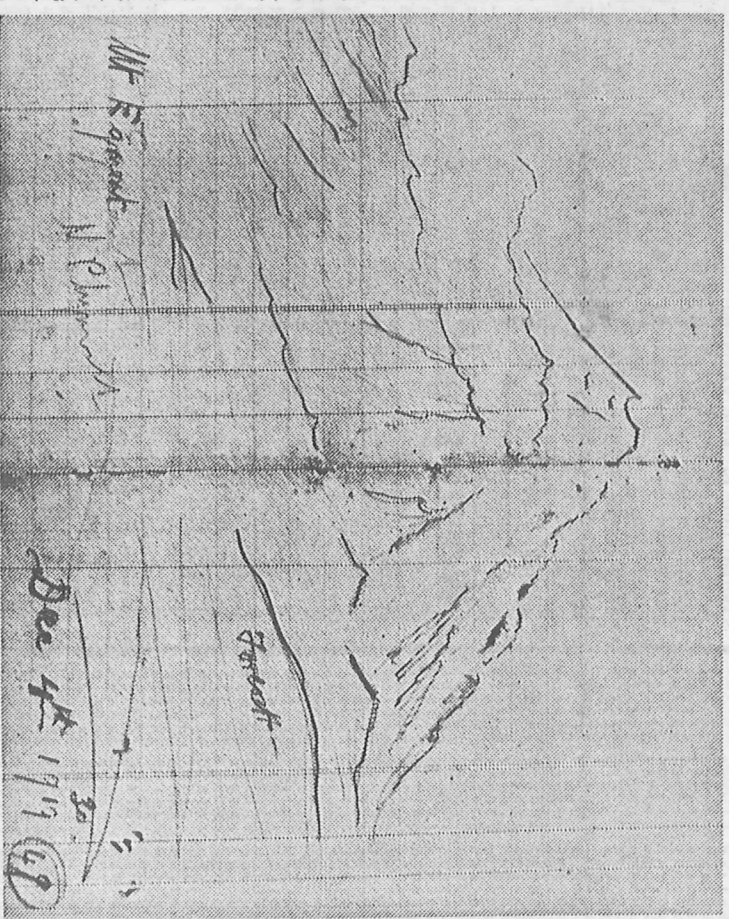
On hundreds of drawings and water colours of Egmont still see with the memory of Blundell who was to do the botanical and text, hoping to collaborate in publishing a book. But Egmont claimed Mr Blundell as a victim when he died from exhaustion tramping from the Pouton akai Ranges to North Egmont in 1925 and the book did not eventuate. A unique collection was gradually dispersed.

## The key

"If you haven't a good skeleton you can't have a face, furrowed by gorges and clothed by bush, and to me that face is beautiful as it is. That is how I have tried to show her."

## The key

Mr Aris said he particularly liked to paint Egmont at the end of a day when the shadows are falling, bringing into relief the face of the mountain. He enjoyed doing a big canvas.



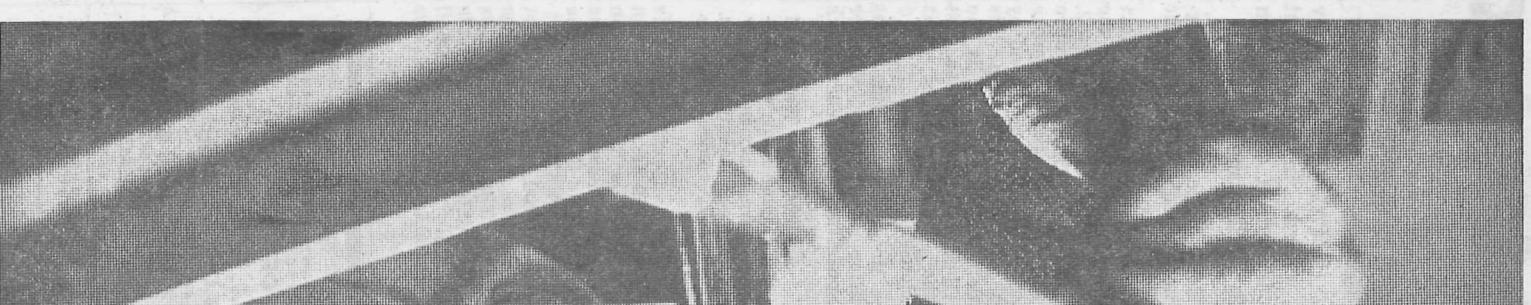
THE FIRST SKETCH of Egmont (from a bus) by the artist on December 4, 1919, contained in a notebook. He climbed on the mountain on this occasion.



THIS "PORTION OF A TOTARA TOP" is one of the few early black and whites remaining in the possession of Bernard Aris. It was drawn in the 1920s on the leaf of an exercise book.



BERNARD ARIS in earlier days seen on the snow-line of Mt Egmont.



BERNARD ARIS



# BERNARD

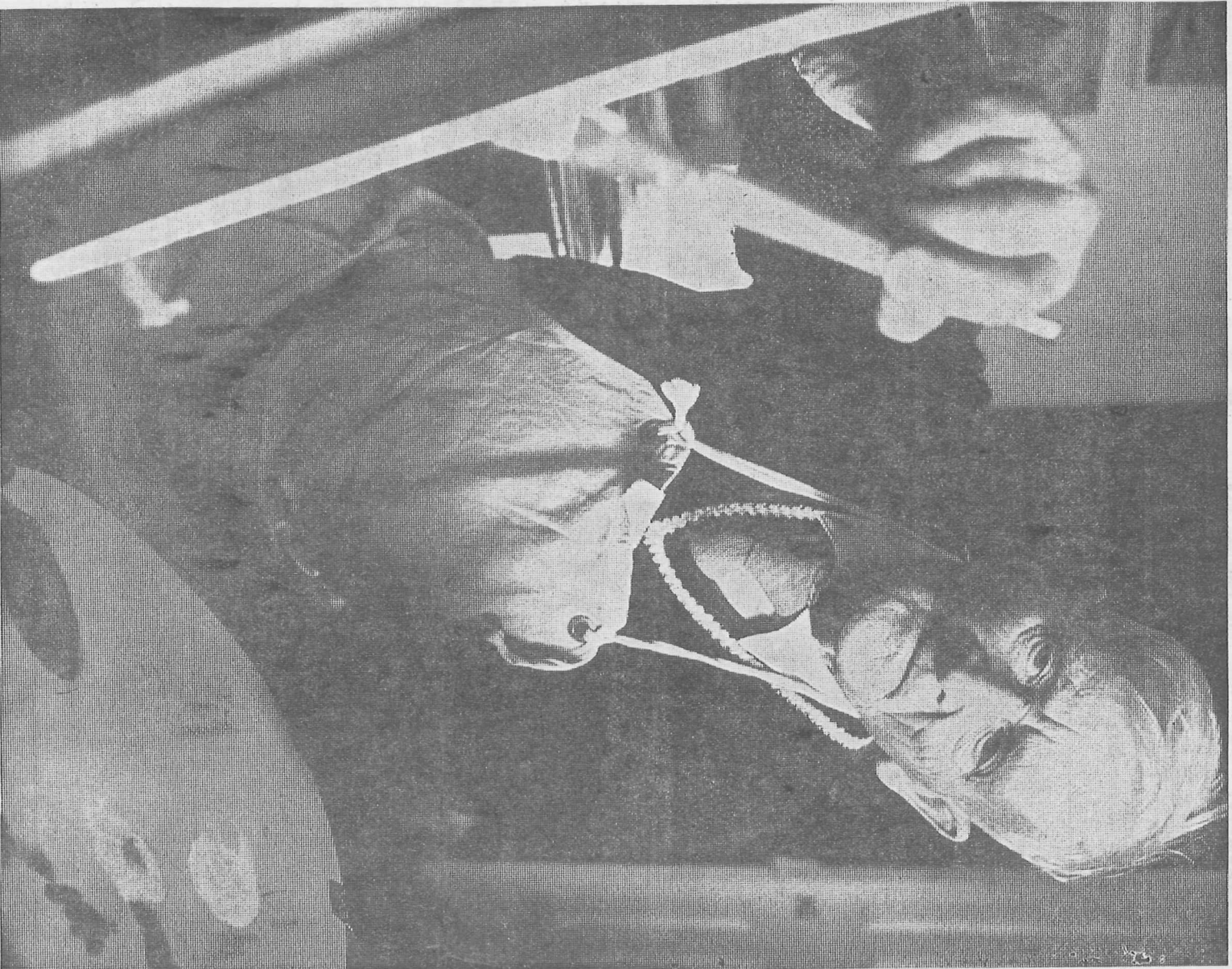
ARIS:

a tribute  
by Anna  
Scanlan



# JD AIN

into New Plymouth  
d saw a spectacular  
he was to carry that  
ctor in his decision to



BERNARD ARIS at the easel at his home in New Plymouth.

nal was missing he could  
still see with the memory  
hat serves him just as sharp-  
y today", or work from  
structural drawings of the  
hape and scene of a moun-  
ain.

"Basically I like realism,"  
Mr Aris told me. "I like the  
absolute truth and shape of  
things and I let my imagina-  
tion go so far and no further.  
Egmont gets her charm  
from her shape and I like  
to paint her as she is. It is  
like painting a girl's face —  
if you don't get the mouth  
right you haven't got the  
face. I see Egmont as an old

face, furrowed by gorges!  
and clothed by bush, and to  
me that face is beautiful as  
it is. That is how I have  
tried to show her."

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arly liked to paint Egmont  
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the shadows are falling,  
bringing into relief the face  
of the mountain. He enjoy-  
ed doing a big canvas.

### The key

"If you haven't a good  
skeleton you can't have a

good body," he commented.  
He believes that the key to  
good drawing is the clock  
system and he has worked  
by this method all his life.  
He judges angles and accu-  
racy by the face of a clock  
and he finds this does not  
fail him.

Although Mr Aris began  
to paint later in oils his  
real love is line work, etch-  
ings and water colour. He  
once did a number of dry  
point copperplates with  
gramophone needles and  
thinks this art has a per-  
sonality above etching and  
happily blistered his fingers  
in the process.

The sketches for much of  
his colour work would be  
quickly drawn at the scene  
for he found that, if he lik-  
ed and admired a view, he  
could carry the colours in  
his mind. "Although some-  
times I made notes on a col-  
our chart as well," he ad-  
ded.

### Problems

But, with changing times,  
the artist struck problems.  
"Today ink is made to dry  
quickly without blotting  
paper," he explained, "and  
when you try to do a black  
and white and go to add an-  
other stroke you find it has  
clogged on the nib. This is  
very frustrating. I had a fav-  
ourite brand of fountain  
pen I used to rely on but  
that changed too and I am  
still trying to get an old one  
fixed. With water colours I  
began to find it hard to get  
the right kind of paper.  
Everything began to change  
and I had to change with it  
and that is really why I  
went over to oils."

A search for some of the  
early work of Bernard Aris

took me to the Taranaki Mu-  
seum where I was shown  
several sketch books rang-  
ing over the scene at sea and  
war, to landscape and Eg-  
mont. Although but a frag-  
ment they revealed a fine-  
drawn quality and delicacy  
that showed the intensity of  
an artist who has followed  
his instinct that has shaped  
his life.

This was the man who  
taught himself to draw be-  
cause he must, the honest  
man untraded to be what he  
was. His careful notations of  
date, time of day, weather  
and colour showed the care  
with which he worked. He  
could capture a distant view  
of Ruapehu and Ngauruhoe  
in delicate water colour, as  
expertly as the mood of a  
storm at the breakwater  
when he saw the wind howl-  
ing. "See thou build sure."

### Lively

The Bernard Aris I  
have just met is a man who  
has known many hard times  
and whose hands have often  
been rough with manual toil.  
He can recall occasions when  
he literally "drew for his  
supper" but he does so with-  
out self-pity, for this is no  
part of the man.

He believes, he told me,  
that it is not what happens  
to a person that is import-  
ant, but how he faces it and  
how it emerges from the experi-  
ence. He studies astronomy,  
religion and science, and  
the deeper he delves the  
more it preserves his faith.  
"Although I am not what  
you would call a churchy  
man," he added.

"Nothing is more tragic  
or common than mental in-  
ertia. For every 10 men  
physically lazy there are  
10,000 with stagnant minds,"  
he wrote in an early sketch  
book.

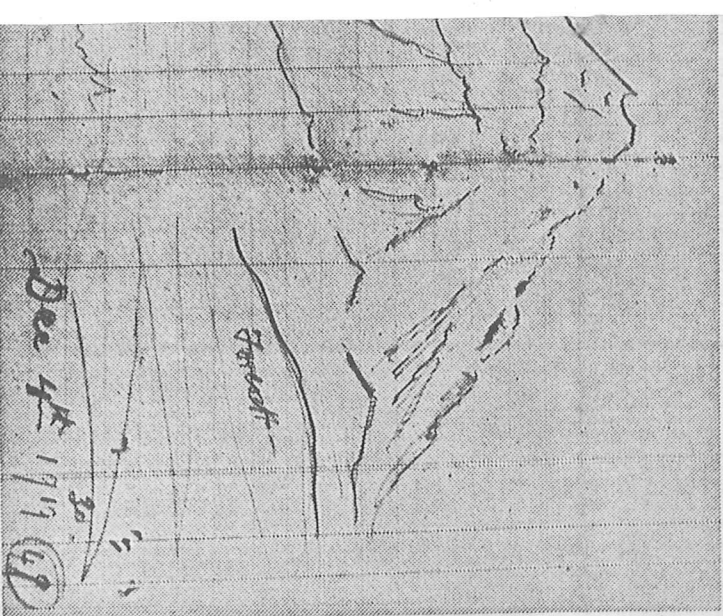
This is the Bernard Aris  
with a mind still so lively  
and inquiring that he ex-  
plores the riddle of a uni-  
verse with an ageless spirit  
and marvels at its miracle.  
Bernard Aris has always  
been a generous man, ask-  
ing no real material reward  
for himself as an artist. But  
he is rich in spirit and ex-  
perience and humble in a  
way that lifts him above a  
common man.

### Everywhere

His countless Egmonts  
have gone everywhere and  
the fact that he has, of nec-  
essity, he told me, had to do  
numerous "pot boilers,"  
should not detract from his  
basic quality. A true evalua-  
tion of Bernard Aris must  
come one day in the text of  
his whole life and work.

Although he retains little  
of his life's work his clear  
memory serves as a gallery  
in which many pictures still  
hang, and these are the  
ones he cherishes most. But,  
although he is the first to  
deprecate himself, I cannot  
help but wonder if the city  
he has served so well has  
given him just recognition.  
In a very special way, tread-  
ing a self-effacing path, Ber-  
nard Aris has recorded his  
devotion to a mountain and  
made it his own.

To Bernard Aris, the art-  
ist and the man, I pay this  
small tribute.



Egmont (from a bus) by the artist on December 4,  
1917. He climbed on the mountain on this occasion.  
A search for some of the  
early work of Bernard Aris

these pictures."